

"CONCERNING THE LOAVES"

(FEBRUARY 1916)

"He saw them toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary unto them. And about the fourth watch of the night He cometh unto them, walking upon the sea. . . ."

"And they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure and wondered. For they understood not concerning the loaves." (Mark vi. 48-52, A.V. and R.V.)

As these painful months proceed and the order of things visibly breaks up around us, humanity is becoming more and more conscious of undergoing a change in itself and its outlook greater than any of which it has either experience or record. In correspondence with the temples of the mystic cults of antiquity, the world has been often called a great Temple of Initiation into the mysteries of the soul and of God. Such it always may be regarded for the individual soul that is wise enough to treat it as such. But there are occasions when the initiation is not a merely personal one, but operates, as now, upon the collective consciousness of mankind. And initiation always involves at once renunciation and gain; a putting away of what has served its purpose and become effete and unessential, and corresponding attainment of something superior and essential; a transmuting, as from grub to butterfly, in which nothing of essential value originally possessed is lost, but becomes assumed, transfigured, transposed to a higher key and accorded a loftier value, so that of the initiate it may be said:—

Nothing in him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.

Technically, and as a matter of psychologic science,

initiation involves the permanent tuning up of consciousness from a lower to a higher pitch. Awareness, perception,—whether visual or intellectual—become intensified. The crude reactions of the sense-nature, the dull motions of the brain-mentality, give place to enhanced powers of intelligence; whilst "worlds unrealised," the existence of which was previously doubted or denied, come into consciousness and are seen to be immediately at hand. One after another the doors of the great House of Life and its many mansions open to the initiate, who goes in and out thereof and finds unexpected pasture. Maybe even the Master of the House Himself may be met with. Like St Peter we are in prison to the powers of the world-order, from the shackles and walls of which release has appeared impossible. And suddenly "the chains fall from our hands" and the various prison doors "that lead unto the city" of God open to us "of their own accord" and we pass on thither (Acts xii. 5-11). And then we know that the Great Initiator has been about His Father's business, fulfilling the promise: "I will loose the loins of kings (the royal spirit confined within us) to open before Him the two-leaved gates (of our material and psychic parts) and the gates shall not be shut . . . and I will give thee the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places" (Isa. xlv. 1, 3).

This is what is happening to many nowadays. The individual initiations through which innumerable men who are sacrificing themselves at the fighting front are passing will never be known; they may be judged of from odd pieces of intelligence that come to hand and from confidences that reach some of us privately. Nor can we assess the amount of interior unfolding now going on among others who, in a spiritual rather than a physical sense, are at the front also; who have been called upon to make some great voluntary or involuntary sacrifice and have received their baptism of inward fire during these past eighteen months. People are shy of talking about these things and are unable to interpret their feelings or formulate any clear view

of what is coming to pass. But they are well enough aware that things can never again be what they were before this crisis, that an organic change is being effected in the public consciousness; one which we intuitively know will be for the better and not for the worse, and which, though attended with so great anxiety, sorrow, and suffering, is characterised also by a strong undercurrent of peace and joy, the foretaste of that sense of inward triumph and security which friend and foe will share in common when that which is now travailing within them both comes eventually to birth.

We will again consider the times and present events from their deeper and mystical aspect, according them a view which, although entirely different from those previously advanced, is a supplemental rather than a contradictory one. For no single presentation of things seen with the vision of the spirit can exhaust the numerous implications involved. Indeed description of them at all is a matter of great difficulty, whilst, at the best, only a single idea at a time can be developed to help the elucidation of the extremely complex strand of cause and effect of which the world is now experiencing the manifested aspect.

In the beginning of things, it is written, the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters—the informulate material—of creation. In so far as that material still remains “without form and void”—not brought into conformity and likeness with the Divine image—the Spirit is still moving upon those waters’ face and will so continue to move until the task of creation is completed. The Psalmist restated this truth in the words “the Lord dwelleth above the waterfloods, the Lord abideth a king for ever.” The Gospels further restate it by personifying the Creative Spirit as Christ, walking upon the waters of the Galilean lake. Here are three different ways of expressing the same truth. The moving Spirit is in each case the same Spirit; the waters referred to, however clothed in local imagery, are the same waters; we find them sometimes spoken of as “waters of strife,” waters labouring to attain,

through strife, the permanent fixity and peace which must needs characterise the completed image into which they are being fashioned. For our purposes they are the troubled, fluctuating waters of the human mind.

Across the waters of the Palestinian lake the Master directed the disciples to sail after witnessing the feeding of the five thousand with loaves and fishes. “Straightway He constrained His disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida.” It is necessary—it is necessary now—to “go to the other side,” the hidden supra-sensual side of things, and also of the words we are considering, if we wish to understand the value of their physical, phenomenal side. The disciples could not—disciples cannot now—understand that dramatised parable of the loaves and fishes without going to the spirit-side of it, for its external letter and aspect profit nothing. But note that it is only disciples—teachable ones, or the teachable elements in oneself—who are directed to go to the other side and make the discovery. It is useless to send thither any but disciples; and even they are slow to grasp what they are intended to learn. “Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes see ye not? Having ears hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, seven. And He said, How is it that ye do not understand?” (Mark viii. 17–21).

Certain it is that what the original disciples were so slow to understand—the significance of the two “miraculous” feedings—the world has no comprehension of nowadays. Those episodes, as also that other one inseparably connected with them,—the Lord’s walking upon the waters of the lake—are popularly thought of as but the thaumaturgic acts of one possessing abnormal powers over natural elements; and there, save perhaps

for a little pious but benighted moralising upon them, is an end of the matter. I do not think that their meaning, or the large and far-reaching truth they both express and conceal, can be truly discerned by any without going to "the other side" of them and seeing with the eyes of the spirit the universal import of those symbolic and apparently temporal incidents or the value which they have for us to-day. For they involve some understanding of the processes of human evolution; of the world-periods that have preceded this in which we live; of the great world-races that have occupied this planet in times anterior to our officially recognised historic records; of the manner in which, when one race perished and gave room to another, the essential elements it had developed—"the fragments that remained" from it—were gathered up, as it were in so many "baskets full," and carried forward to the succeeding race—so that nothing was lost.

Let us, then, endeavour to "understand concerning the loaves."

Man's earliest physical condition upon this planet was purely animal and sensual. From that stage he gradually developed his rational and intellectual faculties by the help of which he has succeeded in some measure in bringing his grosser part into control and subjection. It remains for him yet to develop his latent divine property of spirituality, and thereby bring both his sense-nature and his intellectuality under the supremacy of his spirit. Now the progression thus epitomised is described in the special symbolic diction employed in our Scriptures in terms of eating, feeding; since all life—animal, intellectual, spiritual—grows by what it feeds on. So from the first eating of the symbolic forbidden fruit in Eden—a plane of life we inhabited before our fall into physical conditions—to the Last Supper eaten on earth to manifest the incorruptible bread prescribed for our salvation and eternal sustenance, the progress is consistently taught as being a mystery of food. We began by eating a food of which it was said "in the day that ye eat of it ye shall surely die," *i.e.* lose the consciousness of true life and pass

into conditions of relative death. We are to end by partaking of a food as to which the word is "whoso eateth of this bread shall never die." The eating of the first food involved our racial fall into the world of sense, which has furnished our fallen spirits with sense-bodies and faculties; by the eating of the second we shall regain or reconstruct our bodies of incorruptible spirit-substance and perpetually enjoy our original conscious state *plus* the value of our experience acquired during the long planetary life of the race. Between man's sensual beginning and his eventual spiritual consummation, however, there are intermediate stages, for man is a sevenfold being and each of his seven properties or principles needs to be separately evolved, nourished, and "fed" to its fullest limits, to ensure his final perfecting,—the process involving enormous periods of time and greater racial transformations than ordinary anthropology takes into account.

To this process of human reintegration from "the image of the earthly" to "the image of the heavenly" are allocated seven days, or world-periods, constituting a Great Week of creation, or rather of re-creation and restoration from the lapse into a condition of deadness and night, culminating in a final Sabbath of Rest. The world-period in which we live is the fourth of those days, and the critical crucial day of the whole seven. Because it is crucial it has as its symbol—and not only in Christian lands or times—the Cross, the token alike of present suffering and of the ultimate glory of consummation. It is that "day" in which, in the human evolutionary process, spirituality as distinct from intellectuality (a previously evolved principle) has come to birth in the race, and has sought to become definitely established in and fused with the race's intellectuality; and it is that day, therefore, in which the Christ has been manifested in the world *without* because the Christ-principle has been implanted or born *within* the racial consciousness, thence to grow through succeeding creative days in wisdom and stature, moulding and transforming the race into the fulness of His image as portrayed prototypally for us in the

Gospels. For these reasons it is this fourth day of our creation which is alluded to as "the fourth watch of the night" when Christ appeared walking upon the waters, "night" alluding to both the "Kali Yuga" (or dark age) in which we live and to the benighted conditions of this external world of time as compared with the internal world of eternal day.

But this "day" is crucial also for another reason; there is involved in it the great peril incident upon an over-development of racial psycho-intellectuality at the expense and to the possible extinguishment of the nascent spirituality. The purely rational principle in man, devoid of spirituality entirely, had become developed and matured in a race anterior to our own, namely, in man of the fourth race of the present world-period. This fact is implied in the symbolic "feeding of the *four* thousand" (the "four" being the real index of what is implied, whilst "thousand" is the numeral of collectiveness, regularly employed in the Scriptures to signify totality).¹ And upon the fourth race having served its purpose in this respect it came to an end ("He sent them away," Mark viii. 9) and gave way to another, but the rational principle it had evolved and perfected was preserved and carried over to the fifth race, of which we and our ancestors within time recognised as historic are members. In that way, then, is to be understood the gathering up of the "fragments that remained" from the fourth race, "seven baskets full," and their transference to and incorporation in the peoples of the fifth race—*i.e.* in ourselves. *We*, the fifth race, are, accordingly, those of whom the "feeding of the *five* thousand" is recorded.

And through the peoples of the fifth race in turn there has been gradually evolving a distinctive characteristic of their own, a measure of spirituality super-added to and tincturing the intellectuality they inherited from their predecessor. Seven (the number of the "fragments that remained" from the fourth race) added to five (the number of the fifth race) results in a degree of evolutionary attainment represented by

¹ As in Exod. xx. 6, 1 Sam. xviii. 7, and numerous other passages.

twelve; and hence it is that there will be "twelve baskets full" to be gathered up and carried over when our present race reaches its term and "He sends it away" (as symbolically He did both the four and the five thousand) that a sixth may develop to carry the evolutionary process one stage nearer that goal in which all our separately evolved "fragments" will combine to fashion perfect Man.

I can only beg the indulgence of patient consideration if that which I am endeavouring very briefly and summarily to explicate be deemed based upon unwarranted assumptions, or if the figures I have employed appear to be but ingenious manipulations, as probably they will to those unversed in the arcane arithmetic employed throughout our Scriptures. But readers who are students of the Kabbala or of the *Sepher Yetzirah* ("The Book of Formation," embodying the Hebrew *gnosis* of the principle upon which the unity of the Divine Spirit externalises itself into multiplicity and differentiation in the material universe) will know that that process is symbolised by an arithmetical progression of 1, 3, 7, 12; whilst others may be reminded that there is a word which says "He hath made all things by measure, weight, and *number*." Now twelve is the number of the farthest limit of the Creator-Spirit's self-extension and externalising; on reaching which It recedes towards its original unity, drawing all "things" back into Itself. It is for this reason that twelve is the number of the divisions of the zodiac (the limits of the extension of the phenomenal universe), as well as of the symbolic Apostles encircling their unifying centre, Christ. And the fact is important here because it implies that in our present race (the fifth), whose "fragments" eventually to be ingathered numbered twelve baskets full, the farthest degree of externalisation of humanity from its centre and origin has been reached. The "twelve" signifies our being at the turning-point of our racial career and evolution, a point from which humanity must turn back (or rather inwards) towards the Unity from which it sprang; a point at which spirituality and intuitiveness must

henceforth eclipse and take precedence of intellectuality, leaving the latter to drop into a subordinate position instead of maintaining the primary place it has been hitherto accorded.

Has not the race for centuries past been indulging its intellectuality, and starved and suppressed the spirituality inherent in it and crying for expression? Has not its head-knowledge increased out of all balance and proportion to the intuitions of its heart, and learning been accorded an honour never accorded to wisdom and simplicity of spirit? Has not modern science—the so cherished offspring of the modern intellect—become perverted, because divested of all saving spirituality, to the most malignant and fiendish ends alike in the methods of war and the economic, social, and commercial machinery of peace, each of them after its own fashion engendering death and insanity and fostering every sensual and mental lust? “They did all eat and were filled.” We have been feeding for centuries upon bread, upon intellectual loaves. The history of Europe these two thousand years is the history of compromise between the intellectual and spiritual elements in us—between our “loaves” and our “fishes”—and it has brought us to this present pass. We have not been wholly devoid or negligent of spirituality, but when the two clashed it has been spirituality which has been accorded the second place. The hour has struck when it must assume the premier place. And the turn of the tide involves inevitable conflict. The present war is the manifested aspect of that conflict. Is it not a war in which powerful organised intellect upon one side is pitted against loosely diffused, unorganised spirituality on the other, which the former is straining to throttle and enthrall? The position has to be reversed. It is spirituality now which needs to become organised and concentrated, whilst the bonds of intellectuality have to become so shattered and for ever dissipated that there may be universal “liberty of the spirit.” How marked the cleavage is between the intellectual and the spiritual, how plainly those qualities respectively characterise the two sides to the

struggle, how they severally account for the successes and failures of each of them up to the present moment, the reader may be left to discern and make his own deduction as to the final issue.

Let us now consider more closely the “feeding of the five thousand” (as narrated in Mark vi. 31–52) in the light of what has been above said. The Master’s conduct, the entire *mise en scène*, are full of world-significance.

A “wilderness” or “desert place,”—the usual biblical formula for this spiritually barren world in which man is being created. Human evolution has already been proceeding in it for long ages, and its antiquity is referred to in the statements that “the time is far passed,” “the *day* was now far spent.” It was two thousand years ago and the Master has in His purview the impending opening up of the then undeveloped European continent and the destiny of those souls, already incarnating (“there were many coming and going”), which were to become for many centuries the dominant peoples of the human family and which were to come under His special care, since, as a new race, they would be born outside the folds and spiritual traditions of the great Oriental and Mosaic dispensations and therefore be “as sheep having no shepherd.” He sees the inchoate barbaric populace of Europe becoming, as the new race of souls enters into it, segregated into sharply defined nationalities, arranging itself into ordered states with highly organised social conditions; sees them, as it were, “sitting down in companies by hundreds and by fifties upon the green grass” (again significant multiples of the number five characterising the race involved, among which some nations would be more and some less intellectually influential). That apparently negligible detail of the “green grass” is full of purport; the fourth evangelist emphasises it also in one of his characteristic side-hints, “now there was much grass in the place” (John vi. 10). The literalist may be reminded here that profuse vegetation is not a feature of the ordinary “desert place.” The “green grass” and “much grass” upon which

the five thousand are bidden to "sit down" declare the conditions into which the souls of the race they typify will actually descend as its members come to birth, and upon which they will continue to indulge such self-reliance—vigorous untamed growth of natural energy and abundance of physical activity. "Grass" simply means carnality. "All *flesh* (fleshliness) is grass. . . . Surely the people is grass" (Isa. xl. 6, 7).

What will be the interior food of this great multitude; the staple distinguishing diet they will desire and be satisfied with? Not "the true bread which cometh down from heaven." These rough, hard-headed, fighting, commercial peoples are not yet ready for that; can appreciate only food of a coarser type. The "true bread" must therefore be held in wise reserve until the time is ripe for it; Heaven does not thrust upon us that for which we are unready, unfit, and do not ask for. So the Master does not disclose His own bread, but enquires "How many loaves have ye?"—as if to say "Of what character and quantity does your own present stock of interior provender consist?"

Now the answer—"five loaves and two fishes"—is an announcement in symbolic physical terms of the soul-properties which did in fact—and still do—distinguish the "multitude" or race in question. "Loaves" stand for the rational or intellectual principle developed to such robustness and acuteness throughout our continent and era; "fishes"—a frequent scriptural and gnostic symbol—for the spirituality. And if seven—the "perfect number"—be taken, as is here implied, as a *scala animæ*, and as representing the sevenfold properties of the soul, it follows that the proportion of intellectuality to spirituality possessed by this "multitude" (or fifth race) is as five to two. An unfavourable proportion perhaps; but note that it is considerably more propitious than that displayed by the precedent fourth race, for the "four thousand" were distinguished by *seven* "loaves," their sevenfold *scala* being wholly given over to carnal rationality and virtually devoid

altogether of spirituality, the very slight infusion of which in that race is spoken of as "a *few small fishes*" that were mingled with their "loaves" (see Mark viii. 7).¹

But despite the disproportion the Master, with His prescience and long view of things, takes them as they are; takes to His own care, blesses, breaks; sanctifying even this inferior food to the shaping of a far-off divine event visible as yet to but Himself. The loaves are multiplied and distributed among the "companies," even as that for which they stand has since been multiplied and as "knowledge has increased" abundantly among the European peoples unto this day. Likewise the two fishes—and all that *they* imply—"He divided among them all." Oh! let us give thanks to-day for those "two fishes" and for His having multiplied them for us. Our loaves, as they were bound to, have at last turned stale and dry and become the proverbial "bread of contention"; for the properties of unspiritualised intellectuality are disruptive, separative; its tendencies are to generate all manner of conflicting thought-modes and mutually exclusive opinions and culture-ideals, and we have "all eaten of it and been filled." Truly man cannot live by bread—intellectual loaves—alone. Spirit—"fishes"—alone is unitive and continues perennially sweet. When the present war-crisis ends and the clash of international ideals subsides, that which will make possible the future harmony and brotherhood of the nations will not be the "bread" the peoples of Europe have so long eaten to their ultimate undoing. It will be that little measure of the spirit of charity and loving-kindness, common to them all and planted from their beginning deep down in the hearts of them all, and waiting only its opportunity to emerge and display itself. It will be those "two fishes" which

¹ It should be noted that the "four thousand," or fourth race, belonged to an earlier "day" or world-period than the "five thousand." "They have now been with Me *three days*" (Mark viii. 2), whereas the "five thousand," or fifth race, is associated with the "*fourth watch*," until which "day" or world-period the Christ did not become manifest.

He has multiplied—and will go on multiplying—and “divided among them *all*.”

And, after they had “eaten and been filled,” “He sent away the people.” They are being “sent away” now. The “five thousand men”—this fifth race—is dissolving at this moment. All its ideals and well-established institutions and methods—social, political, economic, theological—are undergoing gradual but perceptible disintegration. A new era of things is dawning, and, amid the warfare and death-pangs of the old, another new race is being imperceptibly born.

Nothing begins and nothing ends
That is not made with moan;
For we begin in another's pain
And perish in our own.

Yet all the “fragments that remain” of the old one, and that are of real value, will be gathered up and carried forward to the new epoch, constituting the spiritual working capital which its people may be trusted profitably to employ and increase. Nothing worth gathering up will be lost. Through all the great world-periods our “fragments” are being slowly developed and collected—a virtue here, a new faculty there—against that day when they will all be fitted together and combine to make up perfect Man. We talk of war losses—human and material. Let us think rather of the war savings, and consider the “baskets full” which are being conserved.

There is a sequel to the narrative of the feeding of the five thousand, a second half of that symbolic world-story. But it was only for “disciples,” as distinguished from the as yet unteachable multitude; and perhaps still remains so. The teachable ones of all times are to be made to understand the truth that “man cannot live by bread alone,” that is, he must cease to “feed” and reply upon the rational intellect and understanding before he can taste and see how gracious and sufficing is the self-consciousness of his own inherent and divine spirit. That is the burden and conclusion of these

great passages in the Gospel of St Mark, who is pre-eminently the evangelist dealing with the relations between the Christ-influence and man's natural reason. The intellect of man, equally with his sense-nature, is a principle which it was essential should be developed to the full to help on the evolution of, and provide an instrument for, his spirit, but not to dominate and stifle it. Of the carnal intellect it is written “the servant is not greater than his lord,”—the spirit. And although permitted a life and supremacy of its own up to a certain point of development, it is essential that at the due time, whether in the career of the individual or the race, its life should be laid down that it may be taken up again as the obedient and illuminated servant of the spirit. We have become over-intellectualised, and need greatly de-educating before we can experience the utter simplicity, yet perfect knowledge, of the spiritual mind. This is what is implied by the “disciples forgetting (omitting) to take bread” with them (Mark viii. 14-16). They had taken with them in their ship not seven loaves, nor five,—as did the “multitudes”—but only a single loaf. Yet that single loaf proved an obstacle to their spiritual advance. Why? “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod”; all natural ideas and conceptions are tainted with selfhood, with the false leaven of one's personal egoity and of the world-spirit. Intellectually naked and unfilled, without even a single loaf in one's ship, must the soul embark when it seeks the haven of the Christ-consciousness, and to be taken in to its supreme feast. “He filleth the hungry with good things, the (intellectually) rich He hath sent empty away.”

It is, of course, difficult thus to denude and empty ourselves, to cleanse our hearts and minds of their prepossessions, nor is it to be achieved without practice and heroic effort. But that effort is asked for; the sacrifice is claimed. And as we make it—He sees, watches, appreciates the effort. “He saw them toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary unto them,” as the breath of our personal mind-currents and of the *spiritus mundi* always is adverse to the energising of

the divine principle in us. But at length, though it may be attended with distress and amazement of mind, the disciple's toiling is rewarded. He is led beside still waters; and, in perfect quietude of mind, "the wind ceases," and upon the face of them the Christ comes walking.

Christ—the Spirit of God—is moving upon the face of the troubled waters of the racial mind at this day, this "fourth watch of the night," as the world-periods go. But not yet does the multitude behold those waters' face; its consciousness is limited to their turbid weed-grown bottom and the currents that agitate them. Some day it will come to see collectively what now is visible only to individual disciples. Through continual and varied forms of warfare Nature evolves us to the limit of her powers; then comes the moment, whether in the career of the individual or the race, when God initiates, when the imprisoned spiritual consciousness is set free and Christ is seen walking towards us upon our waters of strife. I know that this is being experienced by many during the present agony, and that across the warring waters of the world a Voice is now speaking to us all, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

There are always some spiritually in advance of the majority, some disciples who are bidden to "go to the other side *before* unto Bethsaida" (Mark vi. 45), whose experience serves to help on the backward ones by explaining the conditions and trials of the way and assuring them as to Whom they will meet with upon the journey thither. St John has it (John vi. 17) that such disciples are bidden to go not to Bethsaida, but to Capernaum. It matters not which evangelist is followed. For the reader of the letter of these mysteries and the scanner of biblical atlases Bethsaida and Capernaum appear to be contiguous villages upon the north side of the Lake of Galilee. But disciples are not concerned with mundane geography and place-names save only as these have, for our reflection and instruction, a purposeful symbolic value. They look only to the topography of the Spirit, and know that

neither Bethsaida nor Capernaum is in this world, though neither is beyond our present reach. To either, nay to both of them, we may still journey; to Bethsaida, the "house of nets"—the drag-nets with which out of the waters of creation the Great Fisher is slowly drawing all men unto Him; or to Kephernahum, the "village of comfort"—the abode of The Comforter.